

## The Three Kings Cabbage Tree

By W. R. B. OLIVER,

The species of *Cordyline* found in the Three Kings group has up to the present been assigned to *C. australis*. Recently I had the opportunity of examining a living plant in the grounds of the Plant Diseases Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Auckland, and of specimens taken from this tree, as well as specimens gathered from another living tree growing in the garden of Mr. A. W. B. Powell, Auckland. Together with these I have examined specimens collected on the Three Kings islands and now in the herbaria of the Auckland Museum, the Dominion Museum and the Botany Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Wellington. Comparing these specimens with those of *C. australis*, important differences are evident warranting the naming of the Three Kings form as a distinct species. I am indebted to Miss Joan Dingley for specimens from the tree in the grounds of the Plant Diseases Division, and to Mr. A. W. B. Powell for specimens from his living tree.

The Three Kings cabbage tree was first recorded by Cheeseman (1888) from Great Island. Three years later (1891) he recorded it from Southwest Island and from Northeast Island. The trees on Southwest Island were found above a colony of gannets and were described as short-stemmed, luxuriant plants growing in sheltered places mixed with *Meryta sinclairii*. Mr. W. M. Fraser visited the Three Kings in December, 1928, and reported on the cabbage trees as follows (1929): "Cabbage trees growing to large dimensions, with many branches bearing heads of very long leaves, and flowering profusely, were found near running streams facing the east, and while resembling both the *Cordyline australis* and *C. banksii* the writer is of opinion that the Three Kings variety differs from all those found on the mainland." Collections made in 1934 and subsequently are in the Auckland and Dominion Museums. These are recorded in a paper by myself (1948).

### *Cordyline kaspar* n. sp.

Affinis *C. australis* sed differt foliis latioribus et brevioribus; bracteis latioribus et brevioribus, basi paniculae lobatis; floribus longioribus.

A small, widely branching tree with large terminal leaf clusters and panicles. New branches arise from the base of the terminal clusters. Leaves ensiform, widest above the middle, gradually tapering to an acuminate tip and to a contracted base above an expanded sheath; midrib obscure above, more prominent below, widened towards the base, ribbed on both surfaces; laminae with fine parallel ribs diverging at an angle of about 7° from the midrib; above the sheath the leaf contracts to about half its maximum width; length 60-65 cm., width 55-70 mm., width above sheath 25-35 mm. Panicles terminating the branches, up to 80 cm. or more long, compound, the secondary axes branching once or, occasionally, twice. Bracts of the rachis broadly lanceolate, leaf-like,

but the lower ones usually with a lobe on one or both sides, up to 26 cm. long and 25 mm. wide, the lobes usually short but may be 70 mm. long; upper bracts progressively shorter and proportionately broader, becoming oblong with truncate bases and acute tips; bracts subtending the tertiary axes ovate, acuminate, membranous with dark veins; there are two small bracts in each axil of the branches. Flowers rather closely placed on the tertiary branches and terminal part of the secondary. Bracteoles 3, broadly ovate, acute, hyaline with dark central line, less than half the length of the perianth segments which are narrow oblong, obtuse; margins white, centre pale yellow with 3 dark yellow ribs. Berry (unripe) 3-lobed, with 1-2 curved shining black seeds in each cell. "Fruit white" (E. G. Turbott).

Type specimen in Botany Division, Department S.I.R., No. 87645.

The specific name is that of one of the Three Kings, Kaspar, Melchior and Balthazar, after whom the group was named by Tasman, who discovered it on Twelfth Night eve, 1643.

*Cordyline kaspar* differs from *C. australis* in the shorter and broader leaves with veins arising at a wider angle from the midrib; in the shorter and broader bracts with one or two lobes on the lower ones; and in the longer flowers.

Distribution: Three Kings Islands: Great, Southwest and North-east Islands.

#### REFERENCES.

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Three Kings Cabbage Tree growing in grounds of Plant Diseases Division,  
Auckland. Stick is 2 m. long.

Photo. J. W. Endt.